

## Academic Psychical Research

### (1) Science and Psychical Phenomena

By G. N. M. Tyrrell. Pp. xv+379. (London: Methuen and Co., Ltd., 1938.) 12s. 6d. net.

### (2) Psychical Experiences

Evidence of Purpose. By Zoë Richmond. Pp. viii+112. Foreknowledge. By H. F. Saltmarsh. Pp. viii+120. Ghosts and Apparitions. By W. H. Salter. Pp. vii+138. Hypnosis: Its Meaning and Practice. By Eric Cuddon. Pp. viii+169. 3s. 6d. net each. (London: G. Bell and Sons, Ltd., 1938.)

TO the impartial and independent observer, the relations between psychical research and spiritualism are always of interest. The one can scarcely be active without the other: co-operation is often urged and as often rejected; and a kind of armed neutrality is the result. The more earnest psychical researchers are perfectly well aware that as long as they support and treat with consideration the large number of dubious mediums who prey upon the credulous, their own claims to serious attention are put in jeopardy; whilst the spiritualists demand from them something more than passive inaction as the price for the privilege of investigating the more promising cases.

In the last ten years, a gradual separation has been taking place, for the psychical researchers have now become fully aware that the scientific citadel is not to be stormed by the motley crowd, which has for so long formed a part of their supporters. Not only the method of approach but also the subject matter itself has had to undergo revision. For the time being, the scientific world is not to be presented with accounts of floating tables and phantoms looking as if they were made of chewed paper. It is hoped that better success will be achieved by statistical formulæ and philosophical disquisition. An illustration of these tendencies can be seen in the five volumes now under review.

(1) Mr. Tyrrell, in his summary of a good deal of the field included under the term 'psychical research', has given us one of the best surveys so far published. No one who reads this persuasive and thought-provoking volume can fail to be impressed by the author's obvious sincerity and enthusiasm; neither can he fail to conclude that if this be psychical research, then it is indeed strange that the scientific world remains so aloof and seemingly unfriendly. For here he will find, set out in orderly sequence, accounts of the principal mental phenomena, graded under such terms

as telepathy, clairvoyance, precognition and retro-cognition. After past work is viewed from its historical aspect, the more recent cases, both spontaneous and experimental, are examined and criticized. In the latter part of the book the philosophical and psychological implications are described; and the problem of the nature of human personality is considered in its relation to the phenomena which have been discussed.

(2) If Mr. Tyrrell's book be regarded as an admirable text-book for study, then the other volumes, the titles of which are noted above, can be used as supplements, containing as they do additional cases and discussions. This new series is really a highly condensed selection of material published for the most part in the *Proceedings* and *Journal of the Society for Psychical Research*. Thus the student who wishes to become acquainted with the best cases the Society has to offer cannot do better than read these books, and then, if he wishes, he can go back to the original sources for additional information.

It can scarcely be denied that, viewed as attempts to claim scientific recognition, these volumes are of great interest. To one wholly untrained in psychical research and with no knowledge of what lies behind much of the impressive façade, the effect must be considerable. Only careful analysis and years of experience will weaken that effect, for it is but here and there that the authors under review cite cases as good, which are so clearly full of flaws that suspicion of their critical faculties is aroused. Moreover, the difficulty of appraisal is increased when it is remembered how hard it is to obtain repetitions under varying conditions, and how disinclined experimenters in this field generally are to permit critical and well-informed persons to test their results and examine their evidence.

This does not by any means imply that the value of the evidence here so carefully collected is worthless. But it does suggest that extreme care should be exercised before accepting fully the claims made by these writers and by others like them. Psychologists would do well to remember that these obscure problems belong properly to their own studies; and a neglect of them merely indicates a wish to remain in ignorance of some of the more important aspects of human mental activity. To them, therefore, these volumes can be heartily recommended as text-books, which illustrate better than most what serious psychical research is and what its exponents are doing.